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->From the Editor's Keyboard              "Saying it like it is!"
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I knew that I was going to jinx myself last week when I said, "watch, it'll
probably snow this weekend." It did! Not much, but just enough for Mother
Nature to remind us that winter is still here, unfortunately. We also
dodged a couple of storms already this week, one a major Nor'easter! So, I
guess we all have to be a little more patient and wait for that warm weather
to finally arrive for good.

I don't have a lot to say this week even though there are a number or really
interesting stories developing. As you'll see elsewhere in this week's
issue, Oracle and the Feds are heading to court to discuss Oracle's
continuing attempts at a hostile takeover of PeopleSoft. Also, an
interesting turn of events with SCO's Linux suits - did Microsoft give SCO
$50 million in aid against Linux users? Kids being wooed to visit alcohol
sites? Are spam filters too aggressive? There's a lot of stuff this week,
so let's get to it!

Until next time...

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                        PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                       compiled by Joe Mirando
                          joe@atarinews.org
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This is going to be another short
column... but not quite as short as last week's, I hope.

For my part, I really don't have much to say. Yes, that's a pretty good
indication of how I'm feeling. I seem to be making a little bit of
progress with physical therapy, but being a typical guy, it's not enough
or fast enough.

For anyone who might have missed it, I turned up with a herniated disc
and arthritis in my neck. The one thing I've heard most often from

people... and even from a doctor... is that I'm "too young to have arthritis".

Unfortunately, that's not true. I know of several people who have suffered from arthritis from a young age. I'm talking about ostio-arthritis, which is bad enough, but I know of several people who have suffered from rheumatoid arthritis from a very young age. I've got ostio-arthritis, which you can think of as more of a "wear-and-tear" kind of damage. Rheumatoid arthritis is much worse. It's what happens when your immune system attacks your own joints. As annoying as my problem is, it's nothing when compared with what someone with rheumatoid arthritis deals with.

Well, enough about that. Spring is almost upon us, and one of my favorite holidays is closing in fast. St. Patrick's day! Now, I'm only 1/8th Irish (the other portions being 1/2 Polish, 1/4 Italian and 1/8th German), but that cannot dim my love of the traditional holiday meal for Saint Patrick's Day: Corned beef and cabbage.

Well, from what I understand, the typical resident of Ireland wouldn't be having corned beef and cabbage. I don't know what they WOULD be having, but it ain't corned beef.

If you've ever read this column around Thanksgiving and Christmas, you'll probably remember that I love turkey. Well, corned beef is number two on the list. And I don't even know why. I mean, it's not particularly tender, it's certainly not lean, and the amount of sodium it contains could pickle a... well, a cow, I guess.

Well, while I prepare for the coming feast, let's take a look at the news, hints, tips, and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Last week, 'Sam' asked about displaying a background picture on his MagiC desktop. This week, Ekkehard Flessa tells him:

"So you're presumably using Magxdesk. That one is able to set a background image on it's own. In my german version, that option may be found under Optionen/Einestellungen, Kategorie: Desktop, Kachel [filename.img]

As for graphics formats: The colour depth of the image should be equal or less than the colour depth available for screen display, and it's colour table should match the system colour table in bitplane resolutions.

Pictures from other origins have got to be converted to .IMG and the appropriate colour depth and colour table first."

Mark Duckworth adds:

"It's not too tough. Check out MagiC's documentation. Under preferences or settings depending on how your magic is translated you will see a "desktop" dropdown (there are several different windows available). Select desktop and there is a thing for image. Double click it and a file

selector will come up. Go to C:\gemsys\gemdesk\pat\256\ and select any one of these images and hit okay. Whala, desktop changed.

Try it out. You should be able to find where it's at. If you're not running in 256 cols, you have to use the lesser color ones in the "16" folder."

Sam tells Mark:

"So you're telling me Magic is capable of this and I don't need picdesk? Color me dumbfounded!!"

Derryck Croker tells Sam:

"I hate to say this, but...

It's always best to either read the manual or to take a look through all the menu options for whatever program to look for such settings, especially when there's a menu set aside for such things in full view..."

Sam changes the subject to messing with icons and posts:

"You know, I've been trying to replace some of the icons. I click on one, then go to assign icon, select an icon, and nothing happens. What am I doing wrong?"

Pascal Ricard tells Sam:

"Double-click on the new icon.

As for editing/adding new ones: use a RSC editor.
If you already have a RSC file with the icons for some program, you can copy it (or a symb link to this file) in c:/gemsys/gemdesk/rsc/ "

John Oakes asks about ethernet for his TT:

"I have decided to link my Atari TT030 to my IBOOKG4. Any tips on how to link via Ethernec device. I tried to go via a PC but like life the sod did not want to play ball. So any clues will do."

David Wade asks John:

"What have you tried? What software do you have on the TT030? Direct drive mapping will required NFS or SAMBA for the TT030 and possibly the IBOOK (not sure what you are running on it). I think there is a SAMBA client about but I have never tried it. I use FTP to move files between my PC and ST and TT."

John replies:

"I am going to try my OSX Panther via router and Atari ethernec."

David explains to John:

"That will only give IP connectivity. The Atari does not have any kind of drive mapping software by default. If you take a look at at my page at http://www.dwade.freeserve.co.uk/atari/main.html there is some info about configuring STING for use with a router."

Rodolphe Czuba posts this about DOOM for Atari:

"Seen on DHS webs site : www.dhs.com

Data of Trio released a new version of Doom for Atari recently.

The new version uses SDL 1.2.7beta which features brand new chunky-to-planar routines (by Mikael Kalms / TBL). This should be good news for all Doom-playing CT60-owners as the c2p-routs by kalms are really quick and optimized for 68060. Download PMDoom v0.30pre3. Visit the page of Data/trio (Patrice Mandin)."

Clockmeister jumps in and asks:

"Doom, as in the original Doom? I used to run that on my 486 perfectly, surely anything more then an '040 is overkill?"

Mark Duckworth tells the 'meister:

"The bottleneck is the video, so new c2p routines likely will help that."

Patrice Mandin explains:

"The C2P routine will only be used if you select a 8bit video mode. The default bit depth on Falcon is 16 bits. Read the README files to know how to list available video modes and to select one."

Well folks, that's it for this week. See? I told you it was going to be another short one. Well, tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Legends at PhillyClassic Expo!
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  March 11, 2004

          Meet the Legends of Video Gaming at PhillyClassic Expo

Philadelphia, PA - PhillyClassic is the largest video game expo on the
East Coast, and now, it has become the main annual gathering place for
living video game "legends" - the creators, programmers, and designers that
bring video games to life.

At least a dozen video game "legends" will be present at this year's
event, March 20-21, 2004 at the Valley Forge Convention Center in King of
Prussia, PA.

In recent years the show has featured such notable pioneers as:

  * Sid Meier (the "father of computer games" and creator of the
  Civilization series)
  * Bob Polaro (a notable programmer of one of the earliest video game
  systems - the Atari 2600)
  * Leonard Herman (author of the historical "bible" of the industry,
  Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of Videogames)
  * John P. Sohl (creator of Astrosmash for the Intellivision system)
  * Cassidy Nolen (author of two new games for the old Atari 2600 - Polo
  and Frog Pond)
  * Christopher Tumber (programmer who wrote numerous classic games for
  the Vectrex system)
  * Walter Day (Founder and Chief Scorekeeper at Twin Galaxies, the
  "Guinness book of records" for videogames)
  * Jeff Anderson (curator of Videotopia, the international traveling
  museum exhibit of video games)

"This year, we're very excited to have some of our favorite legends
returning, as well as several new ones joining us for the first time,"
says PhillyClassic organizer David Newman of Bryn Mawr, PA. Newman
continues, "It is through our visiting "legends" that our show is able to
connect videogame past and present in an immediate, hands-on way. Gamers
get to talk to the people who created the worlds in which they've spent
countless hours. That's a unique experience that you can't get sitting at
home!"

The guest list for this year's PhillyClassic expo includes:

  * Tommy Tallarico - a veritable video game industry icon. As one of
  the most successful video game composers in history, he has helped
  revolutionize the gaming world, creating unique audio landscapes that
  enhance the video gaming experience. As a well-recognized on-air
  television personality, Tommy brings his in-depth knowledge, years of

experience, and love of multimedia and video games to PhillyClassic 5.

* Leonard Herman - videogame journalist and author of Phoenix: The
Rise and Fall of Videogames, Lenny will be bringing a special treat to
PhillyClassic attendees: a handmade replica of THE original home video
game console, nicknamed "The Brown Box" (and later known as the Odyssey)
personally built by Ralph Baer, the officially recognized father of video
games. This unit will be available for hands-on play at PhillyClassic!

* Cindy Morgan - in 1981 Cindy played Yori and Lora in the
groundbreaking computer-generated Disney film, TRON. In 2003, she
returned to the TRON universe as the voice of Ma3a for the PC video game
TRON 2.0. Fans may also remember Cindy from her even more famous
(infamous?) role in Caddyshack.

* Howard Scott Warshaw - the Atari programmer and designer responsible
for classic titles such as Yars' Revenge, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and
E.T. Howard will be at PhillyClassic debuting Saboteur - his new game for
the Atari 2600 - an enjoyable multi-level shooter. Saboteur was never
released by Atari, and at some point work was even done to modify the
game to fit the A-Team television show. Howard will be autographing
copies of Saboteur purchased at the show!

* Jeff Anderson - curator of VIDEOTOPIA, the international traveling
museum exhibit of video games. Jeff has the incredible good fortune to
oversee VIDEOTOPIA's massive collection of over 900 arcade video games.
Jeff and his team will be hand-selecting 50 of their favorite coin-op
arcade games and bringing them to the show floor to serve as the heart of
our PhillyClassic arcade. But you won't need any quarters to play - the
machines will be set on free play for the duration of PhillyClassic!

* Joe Grand - author of Hardware Hacking. In addition to all sorts of
computer modifications, this book has over 120 pages of videogame-related
hacks for the Atari 2600, 5200, 7800, 8-bit computers, and the
PlayStation2. The book also covers topics such as custom case mods, iPod
hacks, and wireless and mobile device experimentation. Scary!

* Chris Pence - a master arcade technician, Chris will provide a hands-on
workshop where attendees can see and document all the steps he takes
to make a groovy home arcade machine. Chris has re-built over 50 pinball
machines from top to bottom and retrofitted or otherwise worked on
countless arcade cabinets.

* Ed Fleming - is the founder of Videogame.net, the fastest-growing
videogame education program in America. Through boot camps, summer
programs, and continuing education seminars, Videogame.net teaches
students of all ages what it takes to make it in today's videogame
industry. Ed and his team will be hosting a free hands-on game design
seminar on creating videogame characters during the show.

* Deborah Palicia - better known as "Ms. Pac-Man," Deborah is the
author of the book, Pac-Man Collectibles. When Pac-Man hit the arcades in
1980, fans were hooked and Pac-Man plush toys, videos, cereal, puzzles,
magazines, clocks, phones - you name it - were everywhere. Now, you can
see over 400 photographs that document the Pac-Man merchandising
phenomenon. A fun book with market values that Pac-Maniacs will gobble
right up. Autographed copies of the book, as well as a ton of other
Pac-goodies, will be available at PhillyClassic.

* Roger E. Pedersen - has been designing, producing, and programming

games since the early 1980s. His cumulative title sales have surpassed 10 million copies on over 50 titles for PCs, videogame consoles, arcade machines, as well as web-based and hand-held games. He is the author of the best-selling book, "Game Design Foundations."

* Aimee Dingman - is an artist who spends a good deal of her time and talent creating paintings based on videogames. Aimee's unique paintings will be on display and available for purchase at the show. Aimee says, "I've been an artist and a gamer all my life. That I have the opportunity to create paintings that express my love of gaming is absolutely outstanding! While Atari art is just a part of all that I do as an artist, it's a big part of how I define myself." Aimee has also donated two paintings as door prizes.

* Cassidy Nolen - is another arcade restoration wiz and programmer of new games for the Atari 2600 system, including Polo and Frog Pond, which will make its debut at PhillyClassic. Cassidy is also bringing with him (for exhibit and free play) the very first coin-op arcade game, Computer Space, and also a rare version of a Pong arcade machine made by Williams Electronics. Cassidy is the webmaster of atarionline.com.

PhillyClassic organizer David Newman concludes, "PhillyClassic focuses on the amusement and wonder of video gaming, and brings together all the elements of our videogame culture. These 'living legends' are a huge part of that."

The 5th annual PhillyClassic video game expo blasts into the Valley Forge Convention Center in King of Prussia, PA on March 20-21, 2004. Show hours are Saturday 10am-8pm and Sunday 10am-5pm. Admission is $10 for 1 day ($5 with student ID) and $15 for both days. Kids under 10 are free if accompanied by an adult (1 child per adult).

For more information, and to register to win t-shirts, prizes, and other goodies at the show, please visit the PhillyClassic website at: http://www.phillyclassic.com

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

PayPal Settles N.Y. Probe, Faces Others

Online payment service PayPal has agreed to pay $150,000 to settle charges that it misled customers who expected refunds when purchases went awry, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said on Monday.

The payment service also faces inquiries from the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and several states, parent company eBay Inc. said in its annual report.

The settlement with Spitzer's office clarifies that consumers should not

expect the same level of fraud protection that credit-card companies provide, a Spitzer aide said.

Meanwhile, PayPal's practice of freezing customer accounts as it investigates suspicious transactions has drawn federal and state scrutiny, eBay said.

An eBay spokesman said the FTC had asked the company a number of questions last year but did not open a formal investigation. Other states are currently asking questions as well but have not launched investigations, eBay spokesman Chris Donlay said.

Internet fraud has grown in recent years as scam artists sometimes use auction services like eBay to sell nonexistent products.

The rate of fraudulent PayPal transactions is less than one-half of one percent, Donlay said. But due to the sheer volume of transactions it handles - more than $12.2 billion last year, according to eBay's annual report - the online service is frequently caught in the middle of disputes.

PayPal is not a credit-card company and is not required by law to provide "chargebacks" to consumers should a transaction go wrong, a Spitzer aide said, but the company's customer service agreement had led consumers to believe they enjoyed such protection.

The company offers protection on purchases up to $500, Donlay said.

PayPal agreed to change its user agreement to more clearly describe consumer rights, and will pay New York $150,000 in penalties and investigation costs, Spitzer's office said.

Consumer complaints have also prompted the FTC and other states to investigate.

"As a result of customer complaints, PayPal has ... received inquiries regarding its restriction and disclosure practices from the Federal Trade Commission and the attorneys general of a number of states," eBay said in its annual report.

"If PayPal's processes are found to violate federal or state law on consumer protection and unfair business practices, it could be subject to an enforcement action or fines."

An FTC spokeswoman declined to comment.

Disgruntled buyers in irate postings on Internet message boards have said that PayPal does not deal with complaints promptly, while sellers say the payment service is too quick to side with consumers.

One critic said PayPal holds onto the disputed funds as long as possible for its own gain.

"They only seem to freeze accounts that have thousands of dollars in them, and then when they freeze them they hold them for six months, so that gives them six months' free use of other people's money," said Izzy Goodman, a computer programer whose Web site collects PayPal complaints.

PayPal has recently streamlined the process, Donlay said, and holds onto the money to make sure that it can be recovered.

"We need to do that to make sure the money is safe while we do the investigations," Donlay said.

Credit-card companies American Express Co. and Discover, a division of Morgan Stanley, agreed last year to provide chargebacks for consumers who used their cards in PayPal transactions but did not receive the goods they ordered.

Microsoft Behind $50 Million SCO Investment

Executives from Microsoft Corp. introduced The SCO Group Inc. to an investment fund that provided the Lindon, Utah, company with a US$50 million investment last October, a spokesman for the fund confirmed Thursday.

Microsoft executives talking to BayStar Capital suggested the investor should look into SCO as an investment opportunity, said Bob McGrath, a BayStar spokesman. "BayStar was introduced to SCO by executives at Microsoft," McGrath said. "We talk to individuals all the time about investment."

SCO claims that the Linux operating system contains code that violates its intellectual property rights, and it has launched lawsuits against IBM Corp. and Novell Inc. in connection with those claims.

Microsoft, whose Windows operating system monopoly is threatened by Linux, has paid SCO in the past. A 2003 Unix licensing deal between the two companies earned SCO $16.6 million last year, according to U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings.

The software giant's role in the BayStar financing, however, had been unknown until recently. It first came to light last week, when open-source advocate Eric Raymond published an e-mail written by Mike Anderer, a consultant with SCO contractor S2 Strategic Consulting LLC that appeared to suggest that Microsoft had funneled as much as $86 million into the company

"Microsoft also indicated there was a lot more money out there and they would clearly rather use BayStar 'like' entities to help us get signifigantly [sic] more money if we want to grow further or do acquisitions," the e-mail said.

SCO confirmed the authenticity of the Oct. 12, 2003, e-mail, but dismissed its contents.

"We believe the e-mail was simply a misunderstanding of the facts by an outside consultant who was working on a specific, unrelated project to the BayStar transaction. He was told at the time of his misunderstanding," a SCO spokesman said last week.

While he did not find it surprising that Microsoft had not made a direct investment in BayStar, Raymond speculated that the SCO investment probably involved "an unspoken quid pro quo that would be difficult to verify," on the part of Microsoft.

"They're admitting the most innocuous parts of the truth in the hopes that no one will press them to disclose the really juicy stuff," Raymond said

Thursday, suggesting that more disclosures on the relationship between Microsoft and SCO could emerge should SCO be investigated by the SEC.

So far Microsoft's investment tip has not proved to be a good one. BayStar purchased stock in SCO for $16.93. With SCO's stock trading at $9.66 on Thursday, that means BayStar's initial $50 million investment is now worth $28.5 million.

Microsoft and SCO declined to comment Thursday.

Oracle, Justice Dept. to Meet in Court

An antitrust lawsuit blocking Oracle Corp.'s hostile $9.4 billion bid for rival PeopleSoft Inc. will go to trial June 7, accelerating the timetable for a case that may reveal sensitive information about some of the world's biggest software companies.

U.S. District Judge Vaughn R. Walker set the trial date in a Wednesday court hearing that also featured a fight to shield prized information collected by the federal government from two of Oracle's in-house attorneys.

The June 7 date means the pivotal trial will start two weeks earlier than Oracle and the Justice Department had requested in a court filing earlier this week.

Walker told lawyers he is eager to get the trial completed so the losing side can make a likely appeal directly to the U.S. Supreme Court. Walker plans to allot roughly a month for Oracle and the Justice Department to make their cases so he might be able to rule in July.

A Supreme Court appeal of Walker's decision probably wouldn't be heard until autumn, further prolonging a high-tech showdown that began last June when Oracle first made its unsolicited takeover bid for its rival maker of business applications software.

Pleasanton, Calif.-based PeopleSoft already has rejected Oracle's $26-per-share offer, but the bid might still entice the company's shareholders if Redwood Shores-based Oracle can prevail in the antitrust battle.

The most contentious issue in Wednesday's hearing centered on a motion demanding two of Oracle's in-house attorneys, Dorian Daley and Jeff Ross, be given copies of confidential data that the government collected from 33 companies during an eight-month investigation.

The government agreed that all the information should be turned over to Oracle's law firm, Latham & Watkins, but wants the flexibility to withhold some documents from Daley and Ross, citing the concerns of the companies that turned over the information.

Justice Department lawyer J. Bruce McDonald said some of the cooperating companies are worried about Oracle exploiting the confidential information to gain a competitive edge.

Oracle attorney Daniel Wall argued his company would be at an unfair advantage if two of its own lawyers didn't have full access to the

evidence.

Walker sided with Oracle, saying he is confident Daley and Ross won't share the confidential information with other Oracle employees. He gave the 33 affected companies until Tuesday to explain why some data shouldn't be shared with Oracle's in-house lawyers.

McDonald didn't identify any of the 33 companies, saying the group consisted of Oracle competitors, suppliers and customers.

Microsoft Corp., the world's largest software company, is widely believed to be among the cooperating companies because its plans to compete with the Oracle and PeopleSoft market are crucial to the antitrust case.

After the court hearing, McDonald declined comment when asked if Microsoft is among the 33 companies. He predicted extensive information about many of the software industry's key players is bound to emerge during the antitrust trial.

Top E-Mail Providers Sue Spammers Under New Law

Four of the nation's largest e-mail providers said on Wednesday they had sued hundreds of online marketers under a new federal law that outlaws the worst kinds of "spam" e-mail.

The lawsuits - filed by EarthLink Inc., Microsoft Corp., Yahoo Inc. and Time Warner Inc. unit America Online - mark the first time the law has been tested since it took effect in January.

Six suits were filed in federal courts in California, Georgia, Virginia and Washington state. They claim the defendants obscured their identities and used other deceptive tactics to send out hundreds of millions of pitches for get-rich-quick schemes, pornography and other types of spam.

Company officials said the CAN-SPAM Act, passed last year, makes their fight easier by imposing national standards and increasing penalties to force spammers out of business.

"The lawsuits we file now have some added punch they didn't have before," AOL General Counsel Randall Boe told reporters at a news conference.

Spam accounted for 62 percent of all e-mail in February 2004, up from 50 percent six months earlier, according to anti-spam company Brightmail Inc. Internet providers say the unwanted traffic drives up bandwidth costs and frustrates customers.

The lawsuits filed Tuesday night invoke a wide array of federal and state laws, from trespass to trademark and organized crime statutes. But much of the behavior in question is specifically outlawed by CAN-SPAM.

Defendants falsified return addresses, routed their messages through other computers to cover their tracks, and used misleading subject lines like "important message from AOL," the lawsuits charged.

One group of defendants in Canada sent nearly 100 million messages to Yahoo customers in January alone and resold the e-mail addresses of those who asked to be taken off their mailing list, according to one lawsuit.

Eric Head, Matthew Head and Barry Head of Kitchener, Ontario, also tried to circumvent spam filters by including random, invisible text in each message, the lawsuit alleged.

The defendants could not be reached for comment.

"It's a myth that somehow you can evade the jurisdiction of the U.S. courts by putting a computer offshore," said Microsoft Deputy General Counsel Nancy Anderson. "Most of the individuals involved in spam reside in the United States."

The civil suits filed by the e-mail providers seek unspecified amounts of damages and penalties. Violators could also face jail time under the new law, though government prosecutors have filed no criminal charges yet.

"Every major case we've filed, we've definitely had law-enforcement interest and generally followed up, so I expect something will come out of this as well," said EarthLink Chief Privacy Officer Les Seagraves.

The Federal Trade Commission has several spam cases in the works, a spokeswoman said.

An FBI spokesman did not return a call seeking comment.

One privacy activist noted that Internet providers had ensured that the new law would prevent individual lawsuits, so their own marketing efforts wouldn't get them in hot water.

"Microsoft, AOL and Yahoo all send out vast quantities of e-mail, and they don't want to get sued," said Jason Catlett, president of the Junkbusters Corp. consulting firm. "There could have been thousands of litigants against spammers, not four."

U.S. Regulators to Weigh Anti-Spam Tactics

U.S. regulators said on Thursday they would seek to prevent "spam" messages from reaching mobile phones and consider setting up a registry of e-mail users who don't want to receive junk messages.

The Federal Communications Commission said it would look into ways to keep cell phones free of the unwanted messages that plague computer networks, while the Federal Trade Commission said it would explore whether it could duplicate its "Do Not Call" anti-telemarketing registry for e-mail users.

At separate events, the heads of both agencies displayed starkly contrasting levels of enthusiasm for their tasks.

FCC Chairman Michael Powell likened spam messages to "cockroaches" and said he hoped government and private-sector efforts could "exterminate them from your electronic living room" at an agency meeting.

FTC Chairman Timothy Muris, meanwhile, repeated his doubts that a do-not-spam list could work against rogue marketers who already flout the law.

"I've seen nothing to change my mind, but we are doing an in-depth study,

and perhaps there will be some new evidence that comes out of that study,"
Muris told a conference of consumer advocates.

Get-rich-quick schemes, pornography and other unsolicited bulk messages
account for 62 percent of all e-mail traffic, according to filtering firm
Brightmail Inc.

Consumer outrage spurred Congress to outlaw many of the worst forms of spam
last year. The law has already been invoked by four large Internet
providers in suits against online marketers, and FTC investigators say they
are preparing several cases as well.

But other aspects of the law, such as how to label pornographic messages,
need to be fleshed out by regulators before they can take effect.

Cell-phone spam has emerged as a major problem in countries like Japan,
where "text messaging" is popular.

U.S. carriers say they have largely controlled the problem so far as they
have much greater control over their networks than do Internet providers.

FCC regulators will ask for public comments as they try to figure out how
to distinguish unwanted spam from legitimate messages, how to allow
mobile-phone users to block unsolicited messages or tell marketers to leave
them alone.

The agency will also consider whether to set up a "do-not-spam" list of
text-message addresses. A report is due in late September.

The FTC will tell Congress by June 16 whether a no-spam list could help
regular e-mail users receive less spam.

The agency's Do Not Call registry for those who do not want to receive
telemarketing calls has been widely hailed as a success, attracting some
58 million phone numbers since it was rolled out last July.

But unlike telemarketers, who respected the list even as they challenged
it in court, spammers are likely to simply ignore a do-not-spam list, Muris
said.

"I said last summer I would advise you not to waste your time to sign up if
there was such a registry, because again we're dealing with people who are
already violating a lot of laws," he said.

                        Spam Filters Often Lose E-Mails

As spam-fighting tools become increasingly aggressive, e-mail recipients
risk losing newsletters and promotions they've requested.

A new study attempts to quantify missed bulk mailings. Return Path, a
company that monitors e-mail performance for online marketers, found that
nearly 19 percent of e-mail sent by its customers never reached the inboxes
of intended recipients.

The figure, for the last half of 2003, is up 3.7 percentage points from the
same period in 2002.

In some cases, the messages weren't delivered at all; in other cases, messages wound up in spam folders that are rarely checked. Though technical glitches can also cause mail to disappear, Return Path blames most of the deletions on spam filters.

Major e-mail service providers, aware that filters can falsely tag messages as spam, have been working on better tools to verify senders of e-mail, so that legitimate mailings can get through.

Promotions and greeting cards were the types of messages most likely to disappear, the study found.

The study was based on a snapshot of messages sent by 100 Return Path customers. Return Path set up test mailboxes with 18 major Internet service providers and monitored about one-fourth of the 120,000 marketing campaigns from those customers.

ICANN Board Approves Controversial Domain Name Service

While a controversial back-ordering service for Web addresses moved another step closer to becoming a reality over the weekend, pending lawsuits leave its future murky.

The board of directors for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers on Saturday approved the back-ordering service, called the wait listing service (WLS), during their Rome meeting. The unanimous board vote followed the end of negotiations between ICANN and VeriSign Inc., which had proposed the service about two years ago.

The WLS would allow those seeking a particular domain name to pay for the right to claim it in the event the current registration expires. It has spawned lawsuits and Congressional hearings questioning whether VeriSign, as the sole registry for the Internet's top domains, .com and .net, should run such a service.

Even as the back-ordering service gains approval, its future remains uncertain. VeriSign last month sued ICANN challenging whether the non-profit corporation has the authority to regulate and restrict the types of services it can offer in the domain-name registry area. In the lawsuit filed earlier this month, VeriSign cites the WLS as one of a series of services that it says fall outside of ICANN's approval.

A VeriSign spokesman on Monday said that the company will continue to cooperate with ICANN concerning the WLS and looks "forward to a resolution."

"We may disagree about whether or not the WLS is a registry service and requires the 2 f year process it has gone through," VeriSign spokesman Tom Galvin said. "(But) we are always going to coordinate and cooperate with ICANN because it's the appropriate thing to do."

ICANN officials say the oversight body will continue its work on the service despite the lawsuit.

"We're moving forward with business as usual on it, and the lawsuit is not affecting ICANN's process for the WLS," Jeffrey said.

Ironically, while VeriSign's lawsuit challenges ICANN's right to regulate it, a group of eight registrars are suing ICANN to block the WLS altogether. They allege that the service, in its current form, would harm consumers and threaten competition.

Derek Newman, the attorney representing the group of registrars, said on Monday that he planned to seek an injunction if the Commerce Department approves the service.

"We would expect (the Commerce Department) to rubber stamp it," said Newman, of Newman & Newman, Attorneys At Law, LLP, in Seattle. "As far as ICANN is concerned, the WLS is approved."

During ICANN's weeklong meetings in Rome last week, the VeriSign-proposed back-ordering service drew criticism during periods of public comment, according to registrars who attended. To Ric Chambers, managing principal of registrar R. Lee Chambers Co. LLC of Ooltewah, Tenn., a plaintiff in the ICANN lawsuit, the board seemed determined to approve the service regardless of the objections raised in Rome.

"It is hard to reconcile the level of disagreement on the WLS and a vote of the board," Chambers said in a statement. "It suggests that there was more going on here this week than was seen and heard in the public meetings."

In other action, ICANN's board voted to start developing a process for the opening up bidding for operation of the .net domain. VeriSign's registry contract for .net expires in June 2005. ICANN plans to develop a process by June 30 of this year.

Alcohol Web Sites Attracting Kids

Alcohol company Web sites are offering a "cyber playground" for underage youths despite promises from the companies to limit their access, according to a study released Tuesday.

The study by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University estimated that alcohol company Web sites received nearly 700,000 visits by underage people from July through December. Many played video games and downloaded music, e-mail gadgets and icons - all the while immersed in the marketing of beer and liquor, center director Jim O'Hara said.

"These alcohol Web sites are a virtual cyber playground with no adult supervision," O'Hara said. "If a liquor store were this ineffective in policing underage visits, the community would be up in arms."

Frank Coleman of the Distilled Spirits Council in Washington called the study a publicity stunt aimed at generating fund raising. He said the Federal Trade Commission has "reviewed our ads and said they were directed to adults, that our Web content is directed to adults and that 99.9 percent of them had age verification in place, in addition to having responsible drinking messages throughout."

For the study, the Internet audience-measuring service comScore Media Metrix used its panel of U.S. residents as a statistical sampling of Internet users. The study was not a survey but instead monitored actual Internet usage, O'Hara said.

The study showed that about 13 percent of all visitors to 55 alcohol company Web sites were under the legal drinking age of 21. The most popular sites among young people involving distilled spirits, beer and so-called "malternatives," generally sweet-tasting alcohol products.

Bacardi's site - www.bacardi.com - received about 59 percent of its visits from underage persons, according to the study. The two sites receiving the most total hits from underage users were both affiliated with St. Louis-based beer giant Anheuser-Busch Cos. Inc. - www.budlight.com and www.budweiser.com. Both received more than 90,000 estimated visits during the six-month study period.

Parental controls on computers block some, but not all sites, O'Hara said. The study found that while six of eight parental-control programs studied blocked access to the Bud Light site, only one kept underage users away from Bacardi's.

The sites themselves generally require age verification, though there is no way to verify the truthfulness of the user.

The study found that games were featured on 10 of 15 beer Web sites, seven of 19 sites for distilled spirits and four of 12 for so-called "malternatives" - beverages that are malt-based like beer but flavored to taste like liquor.

"There are a lot of features that appear to be in conflict with the industry's own marketing and advertising codes, where they shouldn't be using toys and games," O'Hara said.

Eric Shepard, executive editor of Beer Marketer's Insight magazine, said many 20-somethings play video games, too.

"I don't know how you keep people off a Web site," Shepard said. "What do you do? Take a credit card?"

Anheuser-Busch did not return telephone calls Monday seeking comment.

Bacardi USA spokeswoman Pat Neal had not seen the report but said the company was "highly suspect of the science behind it."

"We are responsible marketers and we do not target underage consumers," Neal said.

Internet Radio Finds Its Groove

Bluegrass fans in the U.S. capital yodeled in protest when radio station WAMU scaled back its music programing in the summer of 2001 in favor of more news and talk shows.

On the floor of the House of Representatives, North Carolina Republican Howard Coble suggested that station managers need to be "introduced to the woodshed" for dropping the likes of Earl Scruggs and Bill Monroe.

But while Washingtonians may no longer be able to hear that high, lonesome sound when they drive home from work, they can listen all day at the office as WAMU disc jockeys now broadcast online at

http://www.bluegrasscountry.org/.

The Web site, which is affiliated with the member-supported radio station, "streams" bluegrass music around the clock and draws roughly 175,000 listeners per month, some from as far away as Australia and Japan.

Broadcast radio stations may be evolving into the aural equivalent of Burger King, offering the same focus-group tested playlists across the United States, but music fans looking for more flavorful fare can pick from more than 5,000 options on the Internet, where "Webcasters" offer everything from Iranian pop to hip-hop subgenres like turntablism.

"The commercial broadcasters have abandoned all but the top few formats," said bluegrasscountry.org manager Dick Cassidy. "Whether it's jazz, classical, show tunes or whatever, you can get a lot of that on the Web if you want it."

The medium has found a niche among office workers, where a pair of headphones plugged into a computer may be less intrusive than a desktop radio.

Top services now attract more than 1 million listeners per week, according to research firm Arbitron Inc. .

One address - http://www.shoutcast.com - points to thousands of different stations. There's western swing at http://www.steelradio.com/, ambient techno and lounge music at http://www.somafm.com/ and favorite porno film soundtracks at http://fluffertrax.com/.

Many conventional radio stations also "simulcast" their signals to reach a broader audience. Seattle's KEXP (http://www.kexp.org), which relies on listener contributions, says 20 percent of pledges come from outside Washington state.

Anybody with a computer, a CD collection and broadcast software like Destiny Media Technologies Inc.'s Pirate Radio (http://www.pirateradio.com) can set up an online radio station. But staying online can be tough.

Unlike regular radio stations, success spells higher expenses for online broadcasters because they must buy more bandwidth as their audience grows. Most are also liable for royalties to performers, songwriters and record labels.

"I think the struggle right now is, 'Hey, it's time to make some money on this,"' said Paul Maloney, editor of the Radio and Internet Newsletter, an online trade journal at http://www.kurthanson.com/.

Some stations slip in commercials between songs, but avid listeners may find it worthwhile to pay a monthly fee to enjoy more features, fewer ads or better sound quality.

Pioneer service NetRadio Corp. pulled the plug in 2001 after funding dried up, but emerged a year later as a subscription service (http://www.netradio.com) offering jazz and classical-music broadcasts for $8.99 per month.

Yahoo Inc.'s LaunchCast (http://launch.yahoo.com) offers some channels for free and allows listeners to build their own stations around their favorite music.

Users specify their favorite artists, and LaunchCast builds a custom playlist of similar material, based on the same technology Amazon.com Inc. (http://www.amazon.com) uses to recommend books.

Those who pay $3.99 a month enjoy a wider selection of commercial-free music, better sound quality and the ability to skip past songs they don't like. They can also create multiple custom stations.

America Online (http://www.aol.com), a division of Time Warner Inc., touts its 175 net-radio stations when it tries to convince dialup customers to upgrade to broadband service, where sound quality is noticeably better.

AOL's service has been a hit, claiming 14 of the top 20 most-heard stations, according to Arbitron. Popular broadcast formats such as smooth jazz, soft rock and "Awesome 80s" loom large on the list.

But specialized operators say they're unlikely to get crowded off the dial this time.

Bluegrasscountry.org is "pretty close" to meeting its expenses, thanks to bandwidth-saving technology, donations from listeners, and underwriting support from bluegrass festivals and other businesses.

"We are supported pretty much by those wonderful people who like what we're doing," Cassidy said.

Will PHP 5 Live Up to Its Billing?

PHP, the open-source scripting language popular in Web applications, is undergoing major renovations. The new version, PHP 5, already has appeared in three public betas and will be in a fourth beta shortly. The development team is aiming for May 2004 availability.

PHP 5 promises Web developers an environment that contains a revised object-oriented programming approach, better XML support, and built-in SQL database capabilities. While those changes may sound trivial, they are nothing short of a major improvement in a language that is being used more and more in large enterprises.

Previous versions of PHP had some form of object-oriented support, but it was very limited, Zuraski said. "The lack of a strong object-oriented interface began to show" as developers pushed PHP's capabilities. The new version of PHP is what Java would have been if it were a scripting language, he explained. "If you're creating hybrid applications that contain some Java components and PHP, then the syntax, behavior and semantics will be quite similar."

In PHP 4, objects were nothing more than a fancy array, said John Coggeshall, author of "The PHP Developer's Handbook."

"Since then, Zend Engine 2 (the core scripting engine of PHP) completely gutted that system and re-implemented objects in a more logical fashion," Coggeshall told NewsFactor. "[PHP 5] is modeled on a real object-oriented approach to programming," he said.

Another important capability in PHP 5 is improved native XML support. Formerly, PHP was no better than Java or any other language at processing

XML. For example, if a programmer had two different XML extensions, they were not interoperable, Coggeshall pointed out.

With PHP 5, however, working with XML is much simpler. XML parsers, for instance, can be manipulated as if they were PHP objects, Zuraski said.

The new implementation drastically cuts the amount of code that has to be written to get or exchange a piece of XML data. "It makes PHP at least one, ... if not the best, language for processing XML," he said.

PHP 5 builds on that XML support to provide programmers a better way to develop and consume Web services, Zuraski said. With a new SOAP (simple object access protocol) interface written in C, PHP programmers can develop Web services more easily. "Earlier, if you wanted to write a Web service or access you had to do most of the plumbing yourself," Zuraski said. "The [new] functions and objects give [the programmer] an abstraction of SOAP and hide all the plumbing details."

PHP always has been good for creating dynamic-content Web applications that use server resources efficiently. But now developing those applications will become even easier. An important addition to PHP is the addition of SQLite, a lightweight implementation of SQL that obviates the need for the developer to install or integrate a full-fledged SQL data engine.

In PHP 4, a developer had to use a "roll-your-own" file system storage technique or use a database extension, Coggeshall explained. "SQLite can open up fields directly on the filesystem. [There's] no longer a need to write to a proprietary storage system," he said.

Because the data resides on the same server as the application, the setup is ideal for applications that do not need a central database or a cluster of servers, Zuraski said. The license is open source, and SQLite consumes very little memory, he noted.

The only downside to SQLite is that that a developer would not to want to use it when the application requires more than one Web server, Zuraski said. It also should not be used for applications that perform many simultaneous reads and writes. "Database-wide locking will hurt performance quite a bit," he explained.

"It does have an upper limit as to the requests per second you can process," Coggeshall acknowledged. "It's good for smaller applications or useful as a fallback database system."

With all of the fundamental changes to PHP, it is unrealistic to expect 100 percent backward compatibility in PHP 5, Coggeshall said. "The goal is to get [compatibility] as close as possible."

Coggeshall recently attempted to get an object-based library working under PHP 5 and found that about 99 percent of the code worked. "There were only very minor differences and they were easy to spot and correct," he said.

The only "complaint" Coggeshall has about PHP 5 is that the superiority of PHP 5's object model accentuates the inefficiency of PHP 4 scripts. "There is no need to rewrite scripts," he said. "But I feel compelled to."

PHP 5 could remove a barrier to entry for enterprises wanting to use PHP to develop fast Web applications, said George Schlossnagle, a principal at OmniTI, which builds high-speed Web and e-mail architectures. "As [PHP] tries to move into those enterprises, programmers want to reuse the

object-oriented techniques they have learned," Schlossnagle told
NewsFactor. College graduates from the past 10 years consider
object-oriented support a core feature, he said.

For the most part, PHP developers will not be breaking down doors to get
the new version of PHP. In a recent survey conducted by Zend Technologies,
about 20 percent of respondents said they planned to upgrade as soon as
PHP 5 is released. About 75 percent said they would upgrade within one
year. The rest responded by saying they did not plan to upgrade.

"There are definitely a lot of people anxious to have PHP 5 get out the
door," Schlossnagle said. "But there are other people - more conservative
- who are interested in it being stable before they adopt it."

Most of the users and companies that are just now migrating to PHP are
going to use PHP 5 and not bother with PHP 4, Zuraski said. But it will
take more than a year before most programmers have switched to the new
version.

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